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# “Old Theories Upset”

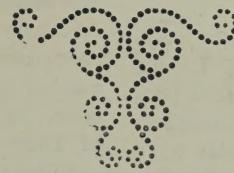
Being the Brief Report of an Address on

## Abraham Lincoln's Lost Grandmother

By William E. Barton, D. D., LL. D.

Author of “The Soul of Abraham Lincoln,”  
“The Paternity of Abraham Lincoln,” etc.

This Address was Delivered before a Specially Invited Company of Scholars and Historians at the Chicago Historical Society.



Reprint from The Chicago Daily News, February 3, 1923

# OLD THEORIES UPSET

REV. W. E. BARTON TELLS OF DISCOVERING LINCOLN'S LOST GRANDMOTHERS

(The recent address of Dr. Barton before a specially invited company assembled by invitation of the Chicago Historical Society has attracted widespread interest among historians and others. Many requests have been received for the publication of the address, which, however, Dr. Barton does not plan to issue at present. The following report from the Chicago Daily News of February 3, 1923, is based in part on Dr. Barton's own notes, and is printed here in response to requests for some account of this essay).

"Declaring that all biographers of Abraham Lincoln were incorrect as to the true identity of Lincoln's grandmother, the Rev. Dr. William E. Barton, pastor of the First Congregational Church, Oak Park, startled American historians today with a paper he read to a selected audience in the Chicago Historical Society's assembly hall.

"Lincoln's Lost Grandmother" was the subject of the address. In his own words, however, Dr. Barton produced not one, but two, grandmothers of the martyred president who have been obscured in the haze of the late eighteenth century in America.

"Dr. Barton delivered his address before a meeting not open to the public, but made up of scholars, historians, judges, and theologians, who were especially invited.

## Years Spent in Inquiry

"Dr. Barton classes the work upon which he bases his facts a 'severe and earnest piece of historical investigation which has required years of industry.'

"I am disputing eminent authorities and compelling a revision of many books," he said, "and I desire that reports of the conclusions I have reached shall not misrepresent the spirit of the paper."

Dr. Barton is the author of "The Paternity of Abraham Lincoln," and other works.

"I have promised to bring to this meeting the lost grandmother of Abraham Lincoln," said Dr. Barton.

"I am prepared to produce not one grandmother but two. All the biographies of Abraham Lincoln are incorrect as to his paternal grandmother.

## Not of the Boone Family

"She was not Mary Shipley, as Nicolay and Hay, on the authority of J. R. Nall, have told us; nor was she of the Boone family, as Gideon Welles, Lincoln's secretary of war, maintained. Nor was the pioneer, Abraham Lincoln, the grandfather, twice married, once to Mary Shipley, mother of his two eldest sons, and later, to Bathsheba Herring, mother of Thomas.

"The marriage licenses of Virginia sometimes gave the name of the groom and omitted that of the bride. So was it with the record of Abraham Lincoln, the president's grandfather. His license to marry was issued in Rockingham county, Virginia, June 9, 1770, and the bride is not named.

"When Abraham Lincoln was selling his farm in Virginia, February 18, 1780, preparatory to removal to Kentucky his wife, Bathsheba signed the deed and on September 8, 1781, relinquished her dower rights. She was

not well at the time and could not ride twelve miles to the courthouse, so a commission was sent to acknowledge her relinquishment. It had been supposed that Bathsheba was a second wife, Mary Shipley being the first. Then when it was discovered that this could not be it was supposed that Bathsheba died in 1781 and Abraham married Mary Shipley as his second wife.

#### Tells of Finding Records

"Last summer, in a pile of old tax lists in the basement of the old capitol at Frankfort, the secretary of the Kentucky Historical Society discovered a list of Washington County for 1792, which shows that Bathsheba Lincoln survived her husband.

"Abraham Lincoln, grandfather of the president, was murdered by Indians, not in 1784 as the president thought, but in May, 1786, and his widow long survived him. Here, then, is the paternal grandmother of President Lincoln, Bathsheba, whom the pioneer Abraham Lincoln married in Rockingham county, Virginia, in 1770, the mother of all his children, his one and only wife. All the books are in error; they must henceforth be corrected. This is the first announcement of the discovery.

"But Bathsheba (whose name may or may not have been Herring) is not the grandmother we are setting out to discover; we include her for good measure. We are after the mother of Nancy Hanks. Here we confront a historical problem of the very greatest difficulty, and one which many books have darkened by words without knowledge.

#### Reviews Hanks Tradition

"The Hanks tradition, as given by Lamon, Herndon, and accepted by Nicolay and Hay, is thus given:

"'Mrs. Lincoln's mother was named Lucy Hanks; her sisters were

Betty, Polly and Nancy, who married Thomas Sparrow, Jesse Friend and Levi Hall. The childhood of Nancy was passed with the Sparrows and she was oftener called by their name than by her own. The whole family connection was composed of people so little given to letters that it is hard to determine the proper names and relationships of the younger members amid the tangle of traditional cousinships.'" (Abraham Lincoln; A History by Nicolay and Hay, Vol. 1, p. 84).

"This statement was undisputed until 1909, when Lea & Hutchinson published their 'Ancestry of Lincoln' and Mrs. Caroline Hanks Hitchcock published her 'Nancy Hanks.' These produced the will of Joseph Hanks, presumed to be the father of these daughters, and there was no such Lucy mentioned in it.

#### Change in Family Tree

"A very elaborate family tree was then published changing all the sisters excepting Polly; she still was left as the wife of Jesse Friend. Elizabeth was declared to be the wife of Levi Hall; Thomas Sparrow was alleged to have been married to Elizabeth Shipley and these were declared to have been the parents of one Nancy Sparrow, who married Charles Friend, brother of Jesse, and these are alleged to have been the parents of Dennis Friend, whose subsequent adoption of the name of Hanks was responsible for no end of confusion. Miss Tarbell accepted this theory and proclaimed it widely. As for Lucy, there was said to have been no such sister; and Nancy, daughter of Joseph, was declared to have been the mother of Abraham Lincoln.

"The motives of those who attempted to substitute this theory for the Hanks tradition were wholly good, though some one who furnished some part of the information cannot be

held guiltless of something worse than carelessness."

"Dr. Barton then proceeded to an intricate and detailed analysis of the evidence as preserved in the Hanks family and declared that there must have been a fourth and older daughter, married and away from home at the time of the making of the will of Joseph Hanks, and for some reason omitted from it.

"Joseph Hanks was an illiterate and a dying man, and the will was made by a lawyer, who, either by mistake or for some reason not stated, gave the names of only three daughters, and devised a heifer to each of them.

#### Finds Obscure Relatives

"In an obscure corner of Kentucky," he continued, "far back from railroads is a section known as 'The Cutoff,' which a legislature separated from one county and added to another with the benevolent purpose of making two democratic counties where formerly there was one.

"There reside literally hundreds of descendants of the president's grandmother, including some first cousins of Abraham Lincoln. They have read no books about him and they have never been interviewed, except by me and by those who are working for me. And every one of those Sparrows knows himself to be related to Abraham Lincoln, and knows how.

Separated from the Hanks family and the Hanks tradition by hundreds of miles of distance and a full century of time, their family Bibles confirm the Hanks tradition at every disputed point.

"Not only so, but I have been able to secure copies of marriage bonds of all the original Sparrow family. I have found most of the marriages of the Hanks family, including the marriage of Thomas Sparrow, not to Elizabeth Shipley, who appears never to have existed, but to Elizabeth Hanks, and they were not the parents of Dennis Hanks, whose mother was the Nancy named in the will of Joseph Hanks.

#### Restores Her to History

"As for Lucy, I have her marriage bond in photostat and a certificate of her legal marriage. She was married to Henry Sparrow, a revolutionary soldier and an honest man, and she brought up her children well, including two ministers of the gospel. She is no disgrace to the family. She had somewhat superior advantages. Her father and her brothers could not write, but she, like all the Hankses who could write at all, wrote with a flourish. Thus do we restore to her rightful place on the line of the president's ancestors, Lucy Hanks, Abraham Lincoln's lost grandmother."

